

### THE STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY AND PLAGUE.

All the various jublations over the eradication of plague in San Francisco and the development of the idea of a plague-free city by properly constructing all buildings so that they are rat-proof, has left out of the record of events the most essential part in the work which was played by the Medical Society of the State of California. At this particular time, when so much reference is being made to the plague fight and the bearing of the successful result upon the possibility of having an Exposition in San Francisco, it seems not unfitting to go back a bit, think of the facts as they were, and place a few words upon the record. To that end and for that purpose we have asked a gentleman who was very active in his interest in the plague situation from the very beginning, to set forth the facts in relation thereto which came within his personal knowledge. The "Williamson Board of Health," to which he refers, was the board thrown out—but refusing to go out—by the then Mayor of San Francisco. Dr. John Williamson was President of the board. The President of the State Society at the time the mass meeting was called in 1908, was Dr. George H. Evans, of San Francisco. Mr. King and Mr. Friedlander, of the Merchants' Exchange, were about the only members of commercial bodies who took the trouble to come to the meeting. The Governor was rabidly anti-plague and wanted a law passed making it a felony to say that plague existed in the State of California; his representative, Dr. Anderson, did what he could to help him along. A more unwholesome condition of things than existed at that time can hardly be imagined.

In 1900 plague was epidemic in Chinatown. I have forgotten the total number of verified cases (121 I think) but the writer personally attended a great many autopsies, reports of which were wired to the Journal of the American Medical Association and published. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Williamson Board of Health at that time, and the Public Health Service under Dr. Kinyoun, to make public the facts, a crusade of vilification and denial was carried on by the business interests and the press which was shameful in the extreme. While business men and press representatives personally and privately expressed their conviction that plague existed, the policy of the press was one of suppression of the facts.

About this time a Federal Commission composed of Professors Barker, Novy and Flexner was appointed by the President to investigate plague in San Francisco. The report of this commission established beyond doubt the existence of this disease and its report became a public record. In spite of such undisputed proof, the policy of denial was persisted in by the press and business interests, aided by Dr. Winslow Anderson and his paid "bacteriologist."

Early in 1908, officers of the State Medical Society, who had been watching with alarm the constantly increasing incidence of plague among the rats captured, concluded that the influence of the organized profession of the state must be exerted in order to obtain the publicity necessary, so that measures for eradication could be undertaken. The influence of the Public Health Service under Dr. Blue, the City Board of Health, and a committee of the County Medical Society had been unsuccessful in forcing publicity. The press and the business interests were unwilling that business should be injured by announcing to the world that plague existed in San Francisco. The public was asleep and ignorant of the danger that hung over the city. The number of infected rats had steadily increased, month by month, from 0.5% in September 1907 to more than 1.5% in January 1908. At this time the President of the State Medical Society requested the Council to appoint a committee to use the power of the profession to force publicity. The President was appointed chairman of such a committee and was empowered to choose his own committeemen. Drs. Jno. M. Williamson, H. M. Sherman, John Gallwey and Jas. H. Parkinson were appointed on this committee. After conference with those interested it was decided to call a mass meeting of those prominent in business and professional life. This was done. Six hundred invitations were sent—60 appeared at the meeting in the California Club Hall one night in January 1908.

At this meeting a resolution was presented and passed, calling for the appointment of a Citizens' Health Committee of 25. A few days later this committee was appointed by the Mayor, the President of the County Medical Society and the President of the State Medical Society. Thus was inaugurated the campaign against plague in San Francisco, the success of which requires no elaboration here. A few days after a large mass meeting was held upon the floor of the Merchants' Exchange and the necessary publicity was obtained.

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